A Notable Autobiography in Letters

THE American family in its best estate, socially, morally and intellectually, had many representatives in New England in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many New Englanders now in their seventies who recall the households they knew in their youth must be able to remember men and women of that day who, in character, education, general knowledge of the affairs of the world at home and abroad and active interest therein, would compare favorably with anybody they have known since.

They did not possess as many books then as we have now, but the books which they did have were usually good ones, and they read them with observable profit. Besides, less reading was not inconsistent with more thought.

The Adamses at Quincy, the Hazards of Peacedale, Rhode Island and the Choates of Salem were illustrative types of such families as we have in mind. Another such family were the New England Hales, to which the late Rev. Edward Everett Hale belonged. The appearance of a volume of *Letters*, by his sister, Susan Hale, has prompted these reflections; and the book deserves notice not only on account of the interesting personality of the author but also on account of what she has to tell us.

Letters as Literature.

Gladstone and Disraeli were not alike in many things, but they agreed in their liking for epistolary literature. Both were readers and admirers of the letters of Madame de Sévigné.

It is related of Gladstone that during his last strenuously contested election campaign in Midlothian, as he was being rapidly driven from place to place in his carriage the Grand Old Man sought relaxation from the cares and excitement of the election by reading the letters of the famous Frenchwoman. His great rival was once confined to his bed by an acute attack of gout and his wife was likewise so crippled by illness in another part of the house that she was unable to get to his sick room. Thus, although they were under the same roof, they had to communicate with one another in writing. Disraeli was so much pleased by one of his wife's missives sent to him under these circumstances that in his answer he wrote: "You have sent me the most amusing and charming letter I ever had. It beats Horace Walpole and Mme. de Sévigné!"—thus showing his love for that form of literature.

Susan Hale's Life.

Nathan Hale, the editor of the Boston *Daily Advertiser*, was the father of the large and able family of which the Rev. Edward Everett Hale became the bright and particular shining light. The youngest child, Susan, was born in Boston in 1833. She became a teacher, an art student, a lecturer and public reader, a traveller and, perhaps most important of all, the head of the summer household of the Hale family at Matunuck, R. I., for many years.

There was little opportunity for much noteworthy achievement in these successive occupations, it may be said; but the fact does not detract from the value or interest of Susan Hale's letters, in the view which we take of them. These letters constitute an intimate narrative of the life, activities and thoughts of a cultivated American woman of the highest and best type during a most interesting period; and it will be chiefly from such sources that the future historians of America will draw their materials for a true portrayal of the social development of the country.

What is even more important to the present day reader is that the letters are entertaining as well as instructive. They fairly sparkle with good spirits in many places and glow with gentle humor in others; and all are written in strong idiomatic English which never leaves you in any doubt as to the author's meaning. So fully do they cover the incidents of Miss Susan Hale's life that they make up a fairly complete autobiography without the need of any editorial annotations or additions except such as are furnished in the preface and introduction.

A Useful Introduction.

The introduction, by Edward E. Hale, gives the reader an informing and sympathetic comprehension of the attractive personality which found such varied expression in these letters. To those now living she was best known as the mistress of the delightful home at Matunuck in the summer and as an enthusiastic traveller in the winter; but in the society of Boston in the '70s she was a brilliant woman of the world in the best sense of that term, with a spirit of sympathy that made young people always regard her as one of themselves.

Mr. Hale, in view of her varied characteristics, admits that it is hard to say just what was the real Susan, but on the whole he concludes that "the most real Susan" was Susan by herself at Matunuck in the moderated autumn, which we call Indian summer. "Then she would swim in the pond in the early morning, breakfast on the piazza, write her letters till mail time, stroll about the hill with the current cat, Geronimo, or some other, talk with Louisa or Mr. Franklin or Mr. George, sit in the south window or on the piazza and darn stockings over a sort of small gourd, read THE SUN, make a fire in the evening and read a novel, out of which she had torn the illustrations, and go to bed at about 8, humming the most successful morning song of the week."

This, of course, is a picture belonging to the second half of her life; she died in 1910, at the age of 77. It should be explained that she was very fond of cats and, indeed, had invented a cat language, in which to talk with them. Her "morning songs," which she used to sing to herself, were also original.

The Amateur Naturalist.

The first letters in the present volume were written in Boston and Brookline, 1848 to 1867. Some of these, and many others, were illustrated by pen and ink or pencil sketches, after the manner of Thackeray. In a letter describing her early school days, at a school of seventy pupils, where "Jane Bradford's sister" was one of the teachers, Susan attempts to reproduce some of the pictures from an admirable old text book, now remembered only by a select few, Agassiz and Gould's *Zoology*. She had an evening lesson in zoology every day, except Monday and Saturday, and was taught by the great Prof. Gould himself. Evidently this instruction did much toward making her a faunal naturalist; for years later, writing to her sister about a warm six mile walk on an April afternoon, Susan gives Lucretia the following list of the animals which she saw and heard:

"Saw one mud turtle, one purple lizard, with yellow spots; 2,000 squirrels, 1,100,000 birds and one dead snake.

"Heard millions of birds, one phœbe, one bird, very rare, name unknown; 20,000,000 frogs, and 0 hylas.

"I forgot to mention among 'Saws' one hepatica bud, very small; smelt one dozen sk——k cabbages and no end of good things."

The Great Storm of '67.

In the following January, the Great Storm of 1867 was the subject of a long letter to her brother, Charles Hale, then Consul-General of the United States in Egypt. This storm has only been surpassed on the Atlantic coast by the great blizzard of 1888.

Susan Hale saw it from her parents' home in Brookline, where the family then resided, and, according to her description, it was, indeed, "very exciting." She was snowed in for two or three days, with several pupils, to whom she gave lessons at this period, and her vivid and humorous story of their experiences offered a striking contrast to the climatic conditions at Cairo, where her letter was read

In Egypt.

She followed it to Egypt herself, on a visit to the Consul-General, in the autumn of the same year; and her letters from Egypt and the Holy Land abound in quaint and felicitous touches, while not wanting in solid substance. Here is her description of her brother's house at Alexandria:

"Charles has one story of a house, two flights from the street. Do you understand? It is all built round a well in the middle, which lights the entry and dining room. People ring at the door at the top of the stairs, just like a street door. I have only been out of it once, that was to go to church Sunday, for ladies don't walk out in Alexandria."

At Assouan, the American missionary "happens to be a Scotchman named Hogg." Here a Mr. Lesley, described as "death on hieroglyphics and cartouches," was of much service to the party. "Thanks to him," says Susan, "we all know Rameses II. like a familiar friend, and the sign of life is as readily recognized and as common here as S. J. 1860 X. on the Ruins of West Roxbury." This cabalistic sign should be S. T. 1860 X., which was the well known emblem blown into the glass bottles of Drake's Plantation Bitters at the time when Susan Hale wrote. Being interpreted, it was supposed to signify "sure thing in ten years from 1860," meaning that the proprietor would attain opulence beyond the dreams of avarice by the year 1870.

Philosophy of Friendship.

In a letter to the same Miss Bursley, on her return from the Nile trip, Susan Hale says that if they both get toothless and shaky twenty years hence they will retire from the world together and fight it out in the N. W. corner of Vermont or some such place. Then follows this characteristic passage:

"Dear, I shall quarrel with one thing you said—but then you'll never stick to it—that it's better not to get attached to people in places, and so save disappointments and separations. Don't you know you've *got* to love somebody and if you shut your heart out from other people you'll take to loving yourself? Look at ——; a melancholy illustration of not caring for others. No, no, love all the people you can. The sufferings from love are not to be compared to the sorrow of loneliness."

Susan Hale's fondness for swimming has been mentioned in the sketch of her life at Matunuck. On the trip to the Holy Land she had a swim in the Dead Sea, to which she applies the adjectives "rapturous" and "delicious." It was necessary to take care, however, to keep the water out of your mouth and eyes; the taste was like "Rochelle powder, potash, salt, mustard, rotten eggs and anything else vile that you can think of."

But the landscape near the Dead Sea is lovely, "a kind of pink heather grows in profusion and willow tufted shrubs and tall grasses—and the sea itself, a lovely soft blue, plashes on the shore like any New England lake, and stretches off between lovely headlands, sparkling and rippling in the sun, far to the south." The Jordan, too, seemed "just like a New England stream brawling along." The party camped one night by the famous Brook Cherith, where the frogs made a prodigious noise. Instead of being a dried up water course, it was really a babbling brook.

Always the Traveller.

Thirty-five years after her first visit to Egypt, Susan Hale took the trip up the Nile again. The camels and the palms and the temples were "right there just the same," but Cairo, Luxor and Assouan in 1905 had become mere replicas of Paris.

The same cheerful spirit, however, pervades her letters. She continued to be an enthusiastic and tireless traveller always, and possessed the rather rare quality of being contented and happy wherever she happened to be. Letters from Spain and from Corsica, from the Island of Jamaica and from California, from Washington and from Chicago, indicate the length and breadth of her wanderings. Life in Chicago, as lived about the time of the World's Fair, is pictured with force and fidelity in this missive to her sister, Lucretia:

"As these people here are rolling in wealth on both sides, it is a luxurious, handsome house, with rugs, pictures, servants *ad lib.*, a turbulent family, slaves to the telephone, which is going incessantly—some of them are a little deaf, so the key is high on which all conversation is pitched. It's odd, but though this *luxe* is as different as possible from the simple Dr. Dudley home, there's the very same flavor of *Chicago unrest*, noise, racket, hurry, bustle, no repose, no particular centre, outside people pouring in, the family pouring out, everybody late to meals, the father hurrying on the food, carriage always at the door, some rushing for cars and missing them, Robert taking snap photographs, the dog bursting in and breaking an expensive plaque, nobody grumbling at anything, all very sunny and happy, very well bred, polite to me, our departure to-night a mere circumstance—such is life in Chicago! I can't think the race can stand it more than 100 years, if so much. Meanwhile, it's amusing to watch."

Furthermore, it is delightful to read about in the letters of a bright and clever woman like Susan Hale. The collection of letters in this volume deserves a place in every distinctively American home library.

LETTERS OF SUSAN HALE. Edited by CAROLINE P. ATKINSON. Marshall Jones Company. $3.50.

"The Buccaneer Farmer"

HAROLD BINDLOSS has written another novel, ***The Buccaneer Farmer***, in which he quits the Canadian wheatlands and his Scottish borders and gives us a picture of English farm life, with a touch of adventure in the Caribbean. The adventure stuff has for background, foreground and wings a Central American revolution. ***The Buccaneer Farmer*** is the best yarn Mr. Bindloss has ever offered us. This is saying something. Consider it said.

Kit Askew, the hero of the story, and his father, Peter Askew, are only a couple of lowbrow farmers, even though Kit's father owns his land and wants for nothing. Both are the friends of poorer farmers who have to pay heavy rents. Naturally Kit and his father are looked upon as meddlers by the large landowners about them.

Osborn, the richest landowner, has a young daughter who (he hopes) will some day marry Alan Thorn, a man of her own class. Through a chance meeting Kit and Grace Osborn become acquainted—and then friends. Grace Osborn likes the people and doesn't like her father's dealings with them, but she places the blame upon his agent, one Hayes. The situation becomes such that Kit's father advises him to join his uncle, Adam Askew, in America. Kit becomes a partner in that uncle's business.

Adam Askew's business? Ah, now it's funny you should ask about that. Because we can't tell you about Adam Askew's strange business. His business is—if you will pardon our saying so—none of your business until you read *The Buccaneer Farmer*.

Eventually, Kit gets back to England, where he meets a challenge which calls for all the courage life has taught him. The outcome is just what it ought to be in a romantic novel.

THE BUCCANEER FARMER. By HAROLD BINDLOSS. Frederick A. Stokes Company. $1.50.